

STATEMENT OF STEPHEN P. MARTIN, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, CONCERNING S. 2417 AND H.R. 4192, TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO DESIGNATE THE PRESIDENT WILLIAM JEFFERSON CLINTON BIRTHPLACE HOME IN HOPE, ARKANSAS, AS A NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE AND UNIT OF THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM.

MAY 16, 2006

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to testify on S. 2417 and H.R. 4192, bills that would authorize the Secretary to establish the President William Jefferson Clinton Birthplace Home as a National Historic Site and a unit of the National Park System in Hope, Arkansas. H.R. 4192 passed the House of Representatives on March 8, 2006, without a hearing. The Department supports the effort to honor the birthplace home of former President Clinton, but suggests amending S. 2417 and H.R. 4192 to authorize a study.

S. 2417 and H.R. 4192 would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to designate the William Jefferson Clinton Birthplace Home as a National Historic Site and a unit of the National Park System should the Secretary acquire, by donation only, the birthplace home and any personal property related to that site from the Clinton Birthplace Foundation, Inc. The Secretary would administer the unit in accordance with laws generally applicable to preserving national historic sites. It is our understanding that the Clinton Birthplace Foundation also intends to donate the existing visitor center located at 415 West, Division Street and adjacent to the birthplace home, however this property was inadvertently left out of S. 2417 and H.R. 4192 when the bills were introduced.

In 1998, Congress passed Public Law 105-391, the National Parks Omnibus Management Act of 1998, which requires congressional authorization of areas to be studied for potential new units of the National Park System. The law also designates the criteria to be followed by the National Park Service (NPS) in determining whether to recommend an area as a unit of the National Park System.

We recognize the importance of the birthplace of President William Jefferson Clinton and therefore appreciate the goals of S. 2417 and H.R. 4192. Consistent with our testimony on the Ronald Reagan Boyhood Home in March 2001, we suggest, however, that the subcommittee ensure that the intent of Congress, as expressed in Public Law 105-391, is carried out by amending the bill to authorize a study of the birthplace and the visitor center to determine whether they conform to the criteria of Public Law 105-391. We recognize the potential significance of these properties and would support an authorization of a new study. We would be glad to work with the subcommittee on the appropriate language.

With respect to historical sites, the studies do not only look at whether the event or person associated with the site was historically significant. They also look at the integrity of the buildings, and other factors, such as whether there are other sites that might more appropriately tell the story associated with a particular individual.

The National Park system consists of many previous residences of former Presidents. However, there are also many residences of former Presidents that are not part of the system. A study would look at whether the Federal government is the most appropriate entity to manage the site.

Some sites are managed by other entities, such as state governments and private foundations.

Conducting a professional study allows Congress to be sure it is protecting an area that meets the criteria of the National Park System.

A study also will enable the NPS and the Congress to identify the costs in acquiring, restoring, and operating a potential site. We believe that the information gathered during the study process is invaluable and better ensures that the NPS can continue its progress in addressing maintenance backlog needs in our national parks. In fact, in March 2001, the Department also took the position that a study was needed when asked to testify on the designation of the Ronald Reagan Boyhood Home as a National Historic Site. Similar to S. 2417 and H.R. 4192, that bill also proposed designation prior to the authorization and completion of a study.

Presidential homes and sites provide a valuable link to understanding our country's history and government and are an important part of our national heritage. Plans to purchase and restore the birthplace home of then President William Jefferson Clinton began in 1993, and the Clinton Birthplace Foundation, a non-profit organization, was formed to purchase, restore, and promote the history of the site. The two and one-half story American four-square home, patterned from a design in France, was built in 1917 by Dr. H.S. Garrett. The home is located at 117 South Hervey Street in Hope, Arkansas, and belonged to President Clinton's maternal grandparents, Eldridge and Edith Cassidy. William Jefferson Blythe, as he was then known, lived there from his birth in 1946, until his mother married Roger Clinton in 1950.

The residence has been returned to its identical state when President Clinton lived there as a

young boy. It is currently open for public tours operated by the Clinton Birthplace Foundation. When the home was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1994, it was described as “. . . the single property most significantly and exclusively associated with Clinton’s humble beginnings, the inner strength he learned from his mother, and the dedication to purpose that has sustained him throughout his distinguished political career.”

The William Jefferson Clinton Birthplace site demonstrates the efforts of a local community working together to preserve and to tell the story of the birth and childhood of a man who later became the 42nd President of the United States to present and future generations.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to comment. This concludes my prepared remarks and I will be happy to answer any questions you or other subcommittee members might have.